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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ABUJA 001594

SIPDIS

KAMPALA FOR AID - DAWN LIBERI; RIYADH FOR POL - R. HANKS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [EFIN](#) [EAID](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: OBASANJO SAYS BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP  
IS A ONE-WAY STREET

REF: ABUJA 1091

CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR HOWARD F. JETER. REASON 1.5  
(B) AND (D).

11. (C) Summary: During a late evening May 18 conversation with Ambassador Jeter, an animated President Obasanjo claimed the bilateral relationship was too one-sided. While we dun him with multiple demands to reform at home and hew our line on foreign policy issues abroad (Zimbabwe and Cuba), we were deaf to his pleas for debt relief. The bilateral relationship would suffer unless we were more forthcoming on the debt issue, he asserted. Recently returned from the ECOWAS meeting in Yamoussoukro, Obasanjo stated that he and President Wade were selected to mediate a Liberian cease-fire. However, Obasanjo was not very sanguine about the assignment, stating President Taylor had previously rebuffed his attempted brokerage between the GOL and its political opposition. Although not wanting to speak in great detail about domestic politics, Obasanjo expressed confidence that elections would be nonviolent and that he would emerge on top. End Summary.

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YOU ARE INDEBTED TO RELIEVE MY DEBT  
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12. (C) A few minutes into a brief discussion with Ambassador Jeter about difficulties the Embassy was having with the Ministry of Women's Affairs regarding operation of the EDDI-funded Community Resource Center in Abuja, Obasanjo quickly picked up the telephone. Calling the Women's Affairs Minister, he ordered her to resolve the problem quickly. Purposefully within earshot of the Ambassador, Obasanjo stressed he had much bigger fish to fry with the USG and wanted this relatively minor irritant off the bilateral docket so that he could focus on the issue that interested him the most -- debt relief.

13. (C) Putting down the telephone receiver and angling his body toward the Ambassador, Obasanjo plaintively remarked the USG "would not be his friend for long" unless he saw progress on debt relief. Becoming more agitated as he spoke, Obasanjo grumbled that he traveled the world for three years championing debt relief but had returned home empty-handed. Stopping himself mid-sentence from using a strong expletive, he lamented, "I have not received one f. penny, not one!" He stated that he had talked to President Bush and Prime Minister Blair but to no avail. "I don't understand it," he decried. Obasanjo then raised the failed debt/environment swap, claiming the USG did not even have the courtesy to formally notify him the proposal was aborted by the oil companies. He learned of the failure through the media but only after he had publicized the deal in Nigeria. By skimming 10 percent of the bilateral debt, he had viewed the swap as a good first step and a political victory. Instead, the episode became a significant embarrassment, he maintained. When Ambassador Jeter tried to make the linkage between reform and relief, Obasanjo flung himself back in his chair for effect and bellowed, "Come on, Ambassador!"

14. (C) While we act cavalierly on issues of grave

concern to him, we had the temerity to demand he follow our lead on issues important to us, Obasanjo asserted. Citing the recent Cuba resolution before the UN Human Rights Commission, Obasanjo railed that the USG expected him to change long-standing GON policy on Cuba, a traditional friend, because the issue was important to the White House. Yet when he asked the USG to change its established policy on debt, he received a cold shoulder. Obasanjo emphasized he was as much a leader of a nation as President Bush. If we wanted him to continue carrying our water in international fora, we should reciprocate on issues of importance to Nigeria.

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LET'S TALK  
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15. (C) When the Ambassador stated the need for frequent dialogue to more clearly define areas of convergent and divergent views, Obasanjo agreed but stressed that Zimbabwe was off-limits. Iterating a theme of their April meeting (reftel), Obasanjo told Ambassador Jeter that all of Africa was looking to Nigeria on Zimbabwe. He had to ensure that whatever decision he took would be seen as truly Nigeria's and not an imposition from the West. "So if you try to talk to me about Zimbabwe, I will cut you off," he pledged. Obasanjo added that the USG linkage of NEPAD and Zimbabwe was wrong-minded. He also blanched the USG would attempt to tell him what NEPAD's mandate should be when he was one of NEPAD's architects. (Comment: Obasanjo's statements imply a significant difference between his vision of the peer review mechanism and what we assume it will be. End comment.)

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LIBERIA, AGAIN!  
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16. (C) Obasanjo related that a significant portion of the Yamoussoukro NEPAD conference was devoted to Liberia. He stated that President Taylor was in serious trouble but had himself to blame; there was little sympathy among ECOWAS Heads of State for their colleague in Monrovia. Obasanjo did not relish being named, along with ECOWAS Chairman Wade, to mediate a cease-fire in Liberia. Obasanjo also claimed that Wade was piqued after Taylor had spat in his soup by insisting on continuation of the "Rabat Process" instead of the proposed intra-ECOWAS diplomacy under Wade's leadership. Giving the impression he did not intend to invest significant energy in this endeavor, Obasanjo remarked that Taylor had rejected his attempt to reconcile the GOL with its political opposition when such a process might have forestalled the LURD emergence. I did my best to bring Taylor to Abuja for talks, but he would not come." Now Taylor's hubris had led to a much stronger challenge to his government's survival.

17. (C) Obasanjo also denied rumors Nigeria had furnished weapons to Taylor. He pointed north to Tripoli as a possible source and said he would ask Quaddafi who has been surprisingly forthright when questioned about Liberia in the past. (Comment: Obasanjo seems to have warmed to the task since the meeting. On May 22, ECOWAS ExSec Chambas informed Ambassador that he had a two-hour meeting with Obasanjo to discuss an ECOWAS team of military advisors visit to Liberia to assess and investigate the deteriorating security situation there. In a May 23 aside, NSA Aliyu Mohammed told the Ambassador the GON had convinced Taylor to come to Abuja for talks about his situation at home. End Comment.)

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ELECTIONS AT HOME -- A PIECE OF CAKE/ A SLICE OF GOD  
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18. (C) Clearly not wanting to engage in a detailed discussion about internal politics, Obasanjo nonetheless became more relaxed when Ambassador Jeter asked about security preparations for the upcoming elections, particularly local government contests in August. Downplaying recent incidents of localized electoral violence, Obasanjo said security preparations were in train. Predicting no major

trouble, he averred, "God and we" would make sure that electioneering did not run amok. Obasanjo expressed confidence that he would be reelected. On his vision for a second term, he stated that his first term was devoted to excising the "debris" clogging the system due to years of misrule. In the next term, he would stick to the same programs and policies but would be able to move faster because of the ground clearing done this term.

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COMMENT  
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19. (C) In many respects a continuation of the meeting reported reftel, this session did not break new ground. However, it brought into sharper focus Obasanjo's edginess regarding lack of progress on debt relief. There is no reason not to take him at his word. Unless there is a better meeting of the minds on the debt question, Obasanjo and the GON will increasingly become more difficult partners.  
JETER